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Clouded Optics

The Defense Dept., concerned over sharp public and professional reaction after department officials descended on a Society of Photo-Optical Instrument Engineers (SPIE) conference and directly or indirectly caused withdrawal of 120 technical papers, is trying to come up with guidelines within about 30 days. One contentious point was that the Defense Dept. "reviewers" arrived less than three days before the conference, apparently at the urging of a SPIE delegate who complained of what he considered security violations (AW&ST Sept. 13, p. 30). On the other hand, the Defense Dept. said the fact that the Soviet Union and client countries would be attending prompted the review action.

This brought charges of government censorship of unclassified papers and, if nothing else, federal intimidation of preparers of papers for public presentation. When the dust settled, Defense officials agreed to meet with SPIE president Richard J. Wollensak. The upshot is yet another Pentagon steering committee to report on proposed guidelines to Defense Secretary Weinberger in 30 days. Still uncertain: are the guidelines for the Defense Dept. or the aerospace industry in general? As one Pentagon official put it: "It's not the secret and top-secret stuff, or the very basic stuff at the bottom. It's the middle ground that is the problem."